

Sue Roling Testimony on HB 146  
House Business & Labor Committee Hearing 2/12/07

I am Sue Roling from Columbia Falls. I own a business in the tourism sector, and I am representing myself. Since 1990 I've been part of a grassroots Montana citizen group called Don't Gamble With The Future that studies very carefully the issue of gambling expansion.

Montana's constitution provides only two ways for new games to be legalized – an act of the legislature or a vote of the people. The governor does not have the authority to authorize new games, and that is exactly as it should be. No one person should be exposed to that kind of pressure from such a notoriously corrupt industry.

In principal, in compliance with I.G.R.A., this state has approved tribal compacts allowing the same games to be played on tribal land that are played elsewhere in the state. And that is exactly as it should be, and it is what "we should budge from" [quoting previous speaker].

This is a terrible bill. Not only does it change the Montana constitution, it contains the largest gambling expansion Montana has ever seen – and NONE of this has been explained to, or debated by, the people of Montana.

It is irresponsible for the legislature to abdicate to the governor its authority over gambling expansion. It's unthinkable that the legislature would give away the people's authority on this matter.

This bill puts the governor between a rock and a hard place, given two options: let the tribes run games that are illegal everywhere else in the state, or get hauled to court for refusing them.

The fiscal notes say the state will lose millions as tribal casinos, that pay no taxes, siphon off business from non-tribal casinos that do pay taxes. The fiscal notes make no attempt to calculate the state's costs due to increased crime, bankruptcy and addition. And the notes only hint at the tremendous losses this will impose on Montana's tavern owners. (I am not a tavern owner.)

Finally, this bill may benefit a few people, but it is clearly not in the best interest of the vast majority. Nor does it provide a solution to the current stand-off in compact negotiations. In fact, it will probably make them worse because it utterly betrays the citizens of Montana who do not want this state to turn into Nevada.

If we need to fix our compacts, then let's fix them. We can do it without adding games that are illegal in Montana and most of this nation.